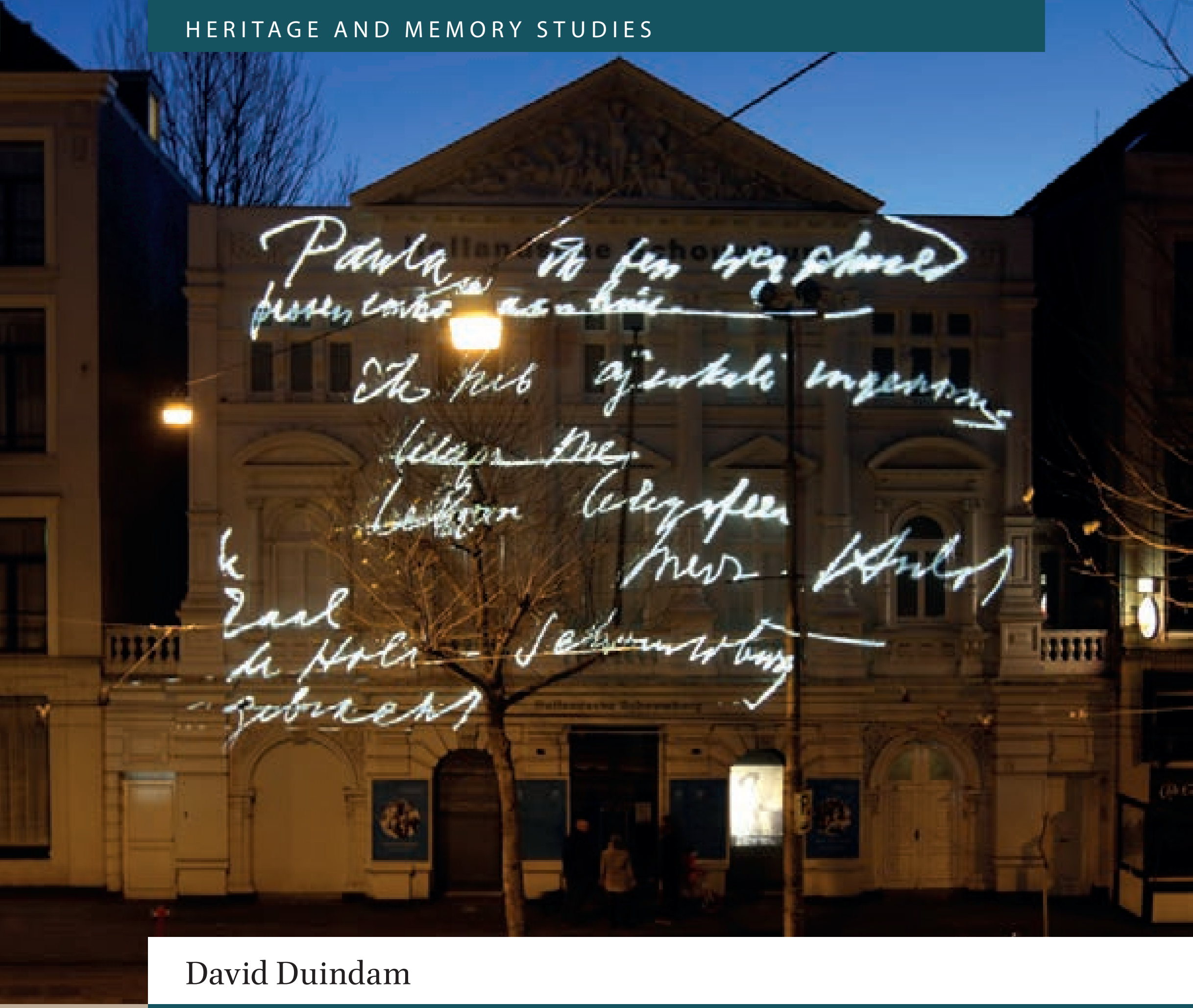
HERITAGE AND MEMORY STUDIES



David Duindam

Fragments of the Holocaust

The Amsterdam Hollandsche Schouwburg as a Site of Memory

Amsterdam
University
Press

Fragments of the Holocaust

Heritage and Memory Studies

This ground-breaking series examines the dynamics of heritage and memory from a transnational, interdisciplinary and integrated approaches. Monographs or edited volumes critically interrogate the politics of heritage and dynamics of memory, as well as the theoretical implications of landscapes and mass violence, nationalism and ethnicity, heritage preservation and conservation, archaeology and (dark) tourism, diaspora and postcolonial memory, the power of aesthetics and the art of absence and forgetting, mourning and performative re-enactments in the present.

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The Amsterdam Hollandsche Schouwburg as a Site of Memory

David Duindam

Amsterdam University Press

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Prologue

The barely legible handwriting projected on the façade of an old theater building, as seen on the cover of this book, demands an effort to be read. The most notable line translates as follows: 'I have taken cyanide.' We are looking at an enlarged suicide note. The two visual artists Femke Kempkes and Machteld Aardse used fragments of this letter, stored in the archives of the Jewish Historical Museum, for their installation *Vaarwel/Last Words* in 2013. They processed the handwritten note and projected it on the Hollandsche Schouwburg (Dutch Theater), a former theater in Amsterdam used for the registration and deportation of at least 46,000 Jews during the German occupation of the Netherlands (1940-1945). The letters on the façade provide only a glimpse of a human life in an extreme situation. They hardly represent the full complexity of its historical moment or give any explanation.

One might wonder how such a fragment leads to a greater understanding of the past. However, Holocaust memory, as all cultural memory, defies the logic of accumulative understanding, as if something was broken into shards that need to be pieced together.[1] Instead, it is generative, produced in the present rather than retrieved from the past. Fragments of a traumatic past remain precisely that: fragmented and partial, part of an ever expanding and changing landscape of objects, sites and media that never leads to a complete and final understanding of the past.

The memory of the Holocaust has its own historiography. Soon after World War II, there was no coherent discourse concerning the persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands or abroad that resembles our current view. In the first decades, commemorations and memorials were key in shaping the memory of the war. In the Netherlands, the persecution and victimhood of Jews was overshadowed by narratives of national recuperation. In the young state of Israel, the image of the passive victim was outflanked by that of the active resister, more specifically the Warsaw Ghetto fighters. Only in the 1960s was the voice of Holocaust survivors heard, under the influence of the

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[1] Throughout this book, I use the term 'Holocaust' to refer to the Nazi persecution of the Jews, unless the term 'Shoah' is used by the quoted party. Neither term covers the underlying historical processes in their full complexity. 'Holocaust' carries the Christian meaning of burnt offering, implying that the persecution of the Jews was a sacrifice. 'Shoah' means 'catastrophe' and carries the Hebrew tradition of destruction with it, and as such turns away from the methodological and organized Nazi genocide. However, as we address the memory of these events, I chose the term most used both in international publications as by the general public. See also Chapter 2.2.

Eichmann trial, and appeared the first large-scale historical studies that dealt specifically with the persecution of the Jews. In the 1980s and 1990s, the Holocaust became an indelible part of the memory of World War II, and important Holocaust museums across the globe were established, sometimes relating this particular trauma to a cosmopolitan ideal of human rights. The persecution of Roma, Sinti, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals and other groups received more public attention. Large-scale video projects collected testimonies of tens of thousands of eyewitnesses, ensuring that their stories would be saved for future generations. Starting in the 2000s and 2010s, the growing distance in time from World War II demanded a greater effort on the part of the members of the public. They were less impressed by abstract narratives of global citizenship and more interested in local histories and biographies. With help of technological innovations, museums were able to offer personalized accounts in multimedia environments. At the same time, authenticity became an ever-growing factor as real objects and sites afforded affective investments.

Within the broad landscape of Holocaust memory, *in situ* sites of memory, specific locations that memorialize or narrate events that took place there, have gained prominence over time. Directly after the war, most of these terror sites were not memorialized but taken into use again. The Hollandsche Schouwburg is an exception to the rule. Now that eyewitnesses are passing away there is a growing interest in these material traces of the past. They seem to be natural memory carriers of an inherent and therefore unmediated story. In reality, however, these sites are curated just as any other memorial or museum that is not site-specific. *In situ* sites of memory conceal their very construction by both staging and emphasizing their authenticity. More importantly, these sites allow for an affective investment on behalf of the visitor that allows them to make the past their own, to appropriate it on their own terms. This appropriation can be, but is not necessarily a claim to permanent and exclusive ownership. We will see that in the case of the Hollandsche Schouwburg, visitors appropriate the site through a process of negotiation, imagination and self-inscription.

In this prologue I provide a concise historical overview of the Hollandsche Schouwburg, discuss the issue of Holocaust representation in relation to sites of memory, address my own implication in the history and presentation of the Hollandsche Schouwburg and conclude with a chapter outline.

The Hollandsche Schouwburg was established in 1892 in the Plantage district, an area bordering on Amsterdam's old city center. The district was not developed as part of Amsterdam's characteristic concentric system of canals due to a period of economic decline at the end of the seventeenth century.[2] In the second half of the nineteenth century, the city went through a period of economic prosperity and the Plantage district was transformed into a wealthy green area with several venues of entertainment and offered luxurious homes to the nouveau riche. This included successful Jews who had thrived during the rise of the diamond industry, as the district was near the main synagogues, a park, four theaters, the city's zoo and a panorama building. To this day, the area still breathes an architectural coherence unique to Amsterdam, combining an eclectic building style with a spaciously designed main avenue, the Plantage Middenlaan.[3] The Hollandsche Schouwburg served as a theater until 1942 in spite of financial struggles, offering mostly light genres – operetta and revue – and at times more serious work by Herman Heijermans, a renowned Dutch Jewish playwright.[4] The Hollandsche Schouwburg was never an exclusively Jewish theater, even if a great deal of the affiliated actors, playwrights and directors were Jews. Both the district and this particular theater were examples of the integration, or assimilation, of Jews before World War II.

On 10 May 1940, Germany invaded the Netherlands. After five days of fighting and the devastating bombardment of Rotterdam, the Dutch capitulated. The Netherlands was put under the control of a civilian rather than a military governor, the Austrian Nazi Arthur Seyss-Inquart. He asserted that the Jewish population would not be harmed, but at the same time took measures that explicitly targeted Jews. One of these measures prohibited Jews from visiting and performing in the same theaters and concert halls as non-Jews. The Nazi administration designated several locations throughout Amsterdam as so-called Jewish locales where an exclusively Jewish audience could see Jewish artists perform, such as the Hollandsche Schouwburg (Dutch Theater), which was renamed Joodsche Schouwburg (Jewish Theater) for this purpose.[5] For several months it was the main venue for Jewish performers who had been forced out of their orchestras and theater groups, until the German occupier seized the building for the registration and incarceration of Jews. When in 1942 the mass deportation of Jews to the so-called work camps in Eastern Europe began, the Amsterdam Jews were first summoned to report in tranches at various train stations throughout the city. In reality, they were sent to the German extermination camps

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[2] One of the reasons the district was not developed for private housing was a decreased interest due to an economic decline in Amsterdam during the last quarter of the seventeenth century. See Feddes, *1000 jaar Amsterdam*, 66.

[3] Roegholt, *Wonen en wetenschap*, 49.

[4] See Groeneboer, "Onbezorgde jaren."

[5] See Göbel, "De Joodsche Schouwburg."

Auschwitz and Sobibor in occupied Poland. When the summons proved to be ineffective – as many people did not show up – it was decided soon after that the deportees needed to register at an assembly center where they were to await their deportation to the transit camp in the north of the Netherlands near the village of Westerbork (later, a second transit camp was opened near Vught in the south of the Netherlands). Initially, the Portuguese Synagogue was selected for this purpose, but because there was no electric lighting and it was difficult to illuminate the inside of this large building, it was decided to use the Hollandsche Schouwburg instead. The building was easy to illuminate, it was not far from the train tracks and was near the old Jewish district. In June 1942, the theater was designed as Umschlagplatz Plantage Middenlaan (Plantage Middenlaan Assembly Center). The newly created center was managed by a Jewish council under German supervision. The council appointed the German Jew Walter Süskind as director of the center, guarded by German troops and Dutch policemen.

For the duration of sixteen months the German administration used the Hollandsche Schouwburg for the registration and deportation of more than 46,000 Jews from around the country.[6] After large numbers of Jews from Amsterdam had been deported, Jews from surrounding municipalities and cities such as Utrecht were forced by the occupier to move into vacant homes in designated Jewish areas within Amsterdam before they were required to register at the assembly center. Some deportees stayed for a few hours or days, others for weeks on end. As a theater, the building had accommodated 800 visitors; now it held up to 1,300 people at a time. The building was in no way equipped: there were no beds or sufficient sanitary facilities, in spite of some provisional arrangements such as the installment of two shower cabins. From October 1942 onward the nursery across the street, called the Crèche, was used to harbor all children under 12 years of age separately from their parents. Policies at the deportation center changed over time. For instance, newcomer registration was organized at one point on the stage and at another in the cloakroom. During the summer of 1942, detainees were able go outside onto the small courtyard behind the stage for some fresh air where some of them had contact with the people living next to the theater. A series of illegal photographs demonstrate how thin the line between inmates and bystanders was during these moments outside. In this early period when the deportation center had been in operation for only a few months, individuals were able to leave the building for a few hours if others vouched for them. At a later stage, the rules became more restrictive: the courtyard was no longer accessible, windows were barred after a suicide and the German guards had made it impossible to leave the building even for a short amount of time.

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[6] Gringold accounts for a minimum of 46,104 Jews who were held there. For a more elaborate account of the assembly center, see Gringold, "'Het gebouw der tranen'."

During the deportations, more than a thousand people escaped and hundreds of children were rescued with the help of Walter Süskind and several resistance groups who successfully hid them with non-Jewish families in other parts of the country.[7] At the Hollandsche Schouwburg, the names of adults were removed from the registry to cover up their flight. Upon agreement of their parents at the Schouwburg, children and especially babies were smuggled out of the Crèche, among others by the nurses who took care of them. People were faced with the uncertain prospect of having to go into hiding or having virtual strangers take away their children. The majority of detained Jews were deported to the transit camps Westerbork and Vught, including Süskind, who died on one of the death marches from Auschwitz near the end of the war. When Amsterdam was declared *judenrein* (free of Jews) by the German authorities in the autumn of 1943, they closed the assembly center and the building stood empty. When Jews in hiding were betrayed and found in this period, they were brought to a police station before being deported to a transit camp. On May 6, 1945, the occupation was officially ended. Of the 140,000 Jews registered in the Netherlands before the war, 107,000 were deported. Only 5,200 returned from the camps.

In 1944, two businessmen bought the theater. Five months after the occupation, they reopened the theater in November 1945. They were met with protest: many people considered it disrespectful to use this former site of deportation as a place of entertainment. An action committee organized a fundraising campaign, acquired the building and donated it to the city of Amsterdam in 1950 with the stipulation that it would not become a place of entertainment. As the city council did not find an appropriate purpose for the theater, it again stood empty and continued to fall into dilapidation. In 1958 the council decided to establish a commemoration site. Due to its bad state, construction workers had to demolish a large part of the building and used the old stage walls and bricks to construct a ruinlike courtyard. In 1962, the mayor of Amsterdam opened the first national memorial dedicated to the memory of the Jewish victims of the war. The front part of the building was more or less preserved. On the first floor, a *chapelle ardente* was installed, a small and intimate memorial. The other floors were rented out as office space. The former theater hall was transformed into a courtyard that mimicked the ground plan of the former theater: the center, where once the seats had been, now was a grass lawn. Instead of walking on the grass, visitors were expected to walk through the side galleries toward the former stage. Here, a large commemorative pylon rested on a base in the shape of a Star of David, encircled by the stripped original stage walls. In the courtyard, a district committee held the annual national World War II commemoration on May 4 and, starting in 1966, a group of Jewish organizations organized Yom HaShoah at this site. The architectural and stylistic design of the memorial was abstract and did not confront the visitor with direct images or narratives of the Holocaust out of respect for relatives and survivors.

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[7] Flim, *Omdat hun hart sprak*; Schellekens, *Walter Süskind*.

During the 1990s, the Jewish Historical Museum took over management of this site and began renovations in order to address and educate new generations. The grass lawn was replaced by a stone pavement, allowing for larger commemorations. Inside, the *chapelle ardente* was replaced by a wall of names and a museum exhibition about the persecution of the Jews was installed on the first floor. The presentation was not abstract, but remained subdued in its tone. Since the early 2000s, the director of the Jewish Historical Museum, Joël Cahen, had the intention to renovate the memorial. In May 2016, the National Holocaust Museum was established across the street from the Hollandsche Schouwburg in an old school building next to the former Crèche. One of the routes to smuggle children out of the Crèche ran through the courtyard of this building. The museum describes itself as 'in creation' as it needs to secure funding and develop new exhibition strategies for a more permanent presentation. The Hollandsche Schouwburg will remain to function as a memorial and the school building will house both permanent and temporary exhibitions.

The Hollandsche Schouwburg is a memorial museum that mediates the events that took place here. This book deals with the cultural memory of the Holocaust and therefore relates to the issue of whether we can properly represent the Holocaust artistically or in the form of a museum without harming the historic complexity and the absolute alterity of the victim's position. How do you, or should you even try to, explain events that defy the very notion of human understanding? According to some thinkers, the organized persecution and murder of Jews took away the victims' ability to testify to their own deaths, and speaking in their place can be seen as a moral conundrum. Philosopher Giorgio Agamben argues that eyewitnesses who survived the Holocaust may paint an accurate picture of the conditions of the concentration and death camps, but cannot truly testify to what happened to those who were murdered. This leads psychoanalyst Dori Laub to characterize the Holocaust as an event without a witness.[8] Along this line of reasoning, taking up the position of speaking for or in the name of the victims would only perpetuate their silencing. Remaining silent altogether, however, is also an impossible solution. Historian Saul Friedländer points out that because the Nazi perpetrators have willfully tried to remove all traces of their crimes, we are obliged to bear witness and try to represent the Holocaust.[9] He describes a paradoxical situation: on the one hand, we need truth, testimonies and attempts at understanding; on the other hand, the Holocaust does not allow for traditional realist representations that claim to fully depict what has actually transpired, as these might offer facile forms of identification, understanding and closure.

According to filmmaker Claude Lanzmann, any claim that it is possible to make the Holocaust wholly understood is obscene.[10] This paradox of never being able to fully understand, but are nevertheless being driven to keep trying to make sense of the Holocaust has fueled the debate about Holocaust representations for several decades. Friedländer observes a recurrent strategy that circumvents this issue, namely:

> the exclusion of straight, documentary realism, [and instead] the use of some sort of allusive or distanced realism. Reality is there, in its starkness, but perceived through a filter: that of memory (distance in time), that of spatial displacement, that of some sort of narrative margin which leaves the unsayable unsaid.[11]

Lanzmann's influential film *Shoah* (1985) is a prime example of such distanced realism. He interviews survivors, bystanders and perpetrators, sometimes *in situ* and at other times in artificial situations that emphasize the fact that these testimonies are displaced in time and space. The realist genre of the testimony is transformed in order to create a critical distance: we need these narratives to try, and ultimately fail, to understand the Holocaust.

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[8] Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 34-36; Laub, "An Event without a Witness."

[9] Friedländer, *Probing the Limits*, 3.

[10] Lanzmann, "The Obscenity of Understanding."

[11] Friedländer, *Probing the Limits*, 17. According to literary researcher Michael Rothberg, there are two general camps in the debate about Holocaust representations. On the one hand, realists try to place the Holocaust within everyday life and try to understand the events. On the other hand, antirealists such as Wiesel and Lanzmann argue that the Holocaust is unique and can ever be understood. Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism*, 4-6. The term 'antirealist', however, might be understood as a retreat from the real, whereas the term 'distanced realism' underscores the attempt of Lanzmann to connect to the real, even if this attempt is doomed to fail.

We should, however, remain aware that these narratives are mediated and reconstructed four decades after the war. *Shoah* refuses to provide definitive answers and demands active participation on behalf of the viewer: there are no facetious ways of dealing with the Holocaust. The audience must truly and critically engage with these representations.

One of the problems of this approach is that it rejects any closure and demands continuous engagement. It does not allow for an imaginative interpretation that makes sense of these events, as that might possibly distort the past. According to literary theorist Ernst van Alphen, there is a taboo concerning the use of figuration as opposed to the objective language of science when it comes to Holocaust representations. For certain critics, fictional and imaginative representations are only deemed acceptable when they evoke the past as unrepresentable, such as the nonnarrative poetry of Paul Celan. 'But as soon as Holocaust art or literature introduces narrative elements that relate to historical "reality," post-Holocaust culture has its guard up. Narrative imaginative images or texts are considered to be in violation of a strict taboo.'[12] According to Van Alphen, this taboo is grounded in a false dichotomy between objective historical and imaginative aesthetic discourse, where the latter is considered undesirable because it replaces the past with something stylized that has no actual basis in reality. However, imaginative discourse does not necessarily need to use metaphoric substitution in order to refer to something that could also be said literally; some events can only be conceived through figuration. 'This approach to figuration makes imaginative discourse not suspect, but absolutely necessary. Only figurative discourse allows expression of that which is unrepresentable in so-called literal, factual, historical language.'[13]

There is a certain amount of uneasiness when it comes to too facile and imaginative renderings of the Holocaust. Not only because of the threat of substituting the past with a stylized narrative, but also because of a fear of what the audience might construe of it. Will the audience, after seeing *La Vita È Bella* (Roberto Benigni, 1997), in which a father fabricates an ingenious story to protect his son from the horrors of everyday persecution, believe that life in the camps would have been manageable if you embraced an imaginative perspective? Here we return to the age-old issue of pedagogic reception: Does the viewer or reader 'get' the right message? The 'correct' reception of Holocaust representations is important according to many critics because the obligation to bear witness implies we should honor the memory of the victims. Misinterpreting these representations and coming to the 'wrong' conclusions seems to be impious, and perhaps even an amoral act.[14]

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[12] Van Alphen, *Caught by History*, 4.

[13] Ibid., 29.

Sites of memory have a specific semiotic quality that distinguishes them from media such as books, films or artwork. Meaning is partly created through their indexical relationship with the past. According to the American linguist C. S. Peirce, there are three different kinds of signs: the icon, the symbol and the index. The icon represents an object through similarity, the symbol through an arbitrary and habitual relationship, and the index through an actual relationship of contiguity or continuity. A footprint is an example of an indexical sign of a person no longer there; there is a causal relationship between these two. These indexical signs are always indirect; a knock on a door announces an arrival, but does not signify the arrival itself. The displacement in space and time demands an active interpretation by the observer, since there is a gap between the signifier and what is being signified. So on the one hand, an indexical sign can act as a form of evidence, as there is an assumed causal, actual relationship between the signifier and the signified; on the other hand, there is a gap between these two. The signified always remains absent and the relationship between these two must be actively produced by the interpreter. This also holds for icons and symbols, however, for these, the relationships are based on similarity or convention, not on contiguity or continuity.

Within the gap between the indexical signifier and what it signifies two oppositional forces are at work which attract each other because of the promise of causality. Once you see a footprint, it is almost impossible not to expect a human body. On the other hand, it is possible you will never find out if that footprint belongs to an actual physical being. This tension is played out in a famous fragment of Daniel Defoe's 1719 novel *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, in which the shipwrecked protagonist finds a footprint on an island that, to his knowledge, is deserted:

> It happened one day about noon, going towards my boat, I was exceedingly surprised with the print of a man's naked foot on the shore, which was very plain to be seen in the sand: I stood like one thunder-struck, or as if I had seen an apparition; I listened, I looked round me, I could hear nothing, nor see any thing; I went up to a rising ground to look farther: I went up the shore, and down the shore, but it was all one, I could see no other impression but that one. [...] [A]fter innumerable fluttering

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[14] According to literary researcher Berel Lang, literary texts can be judged as moral acts because they affect the reader. See Lang, *Act and Idea*, 117-161.

> thoughts, like a man perfectly confused, and out of myself, I came home to my fortification, not feeling, as we say, the ground I went on, but terrified to the last degree, looking behind me at every two or three steps, mistaking every bush and tree, and fancying every stump at a distance to be a man; nor is it possible to describe how many various shapes an affrighted imagination represented things to me in; how many wild ideas were formed every moment in my fancy, and what strange unaccountable whimsies came into my thoughts by the way.[15]

The gap between the footprint and the absent person is cause for paranoia, a heightened awareness of the environment and an imaginative investment on the part of Robinson Crusoe, who even considers the possibility of a ghost. It is precisely this quality of the indexical sign that allows it to act as evidence of something absent, different from symbolic or iconic signs. That does not mean that indexical signs are more precise: because they do not make present what is absent, the interpreter fills in this gap. Indices are almost always fragmentary and depend on an active and imaginative process of appropriation. Literary scholar Marianne Hirsch argues that photographs have an indexical quality that allows for an imaginative investment on behalf of the viewer. 'They are the leftovers, the fragmentary sources and building blocks, shot through with holes, of the work of postmemory. They affirm the past's existence and, in their flat two-dimensionality, they signal its unbridgeable distance.'[16]

Sites of memory such as the Hollandsche Schouwburg are characterized by material traces of the past, such as the old brick walls in the courtyard. By interpreting these not as authentic embodiments of the past that offer a kind of immediate experience, but rather as indexical signs that echo a past that is no longer there, I emphasize the active interpretation of the visitor and the role of both displacement and absence. The gap between the sign and what it refers to is filled up by the visitor's imagination, a process that encourages the visitor to inscribe his or her own biography and imaginations, allowing for a stronger affective engagement.

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[15] Defoe, *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, 156-157.

[16] Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 23. Hirsch also warns us of the potential effects of this active appropriation. '[Photographs] can tell us as much about our own needs and desires (as readers and spectators) as they can about the past world they presumably depict. While authentication and projection can work against each other, the powerful tropes of familiality can also, and sometimes problematically, obscure their distinction. The fragmentariness and the two-dimensional flatness of the photographic image, moreover, make it especially open to narrative elaboration and embroidery and to symbolization.' Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," 117.

The epistemological insecurity – does this index really mean that we have any knowledge about what happened here? – can make visitors hypersensitive, just as Robinson Crusoe's imagination turned bushes into humans. A state of heightened perception and imaginative investment transforms every detail into possible indexical signs. This is what I call the 'latent and contingent indexicality' of *in situ* sites of memory: as visitors expect to find traces of the past they actively look for and may interpret nonauthentic fragments as indexical signs. This indexicality is both latent, as it can be traced back to specific events that took place here, and contingent, as the imagination of visitors cannot be foreseen and often emerges by chance. A good example are the brick walls in the courtyard of the Hollandsche Schouwburg. These are not completely authentic: they are constructed from original bricks that date from 1892, but the current design stems from 1962. Still, these walls are strongly associated with the war by most visitors, since they expect to see an original deportation center. The latent and contingent indexicality of *in situ* sites of memory is based on the promise and expectation of authenticity, regardless of the fact that this authenticity might be (partially) staged or mediated. The question is: Does this indexicality refer to a stable narrative of the Holocaust? Or, in terms of the debate about Holocaust representations, should we mind an imaginative and therefore possibly historically inaccurate appropriation of the Holocaust? Here we come to an important difference between indexical signs and other kinds of texts, as formulated by historian Frank Ankersmit:

> The monument does not tell us something about the past, in the way that the (metaphorical) historical text does, but functions rather like a (metonymical) signpost. Put differently, the monument functions like an index: it requires us to look in a certain direction without specifying what we shall ultimately find in that direction. [...] [It] invites us to project our personal feelings and associations on that part of the past indicated by it.[17]

The index may initiate a process of searching for meaning and allow people to affectively connect to the past, but it does not provide context or information. The question is whether visitors need additional context in order to ground their visit in a broader historical understanding. Most *in situ* memorial museums seem to be centered on these two notions: conjuring up an emotional investment of the visitor and informing them about the past.

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[17] Ankersmit, 179.

With this book, I demonstrate the necessity for studying both the historical and material development of sites of Holocaust memory in relation to the ways in which visitors have appropriated them. I combine a synchronic critical analysis of the current presentation with a diachronic investigation of architectural and curatorial interventions over time. The Hollandsche Schouwburg does not offer immediate access to the past, but is an indexical sign of the Holocaust: it allows visitors to envision past events by pointing out the absence of the victims. Sustaining this imaginative investment is the most distinguishing characteristic of *in situ* memorial museums and can lead to a spatial proliferation of memory.

As any researcher, I am strongly connected to my research object. The Jewish Historical Museum actively involved me in the formulation of the renovation plans for the National Holocaust Museum. Between 2010 and 2016 I attended various meetings with different stakeholders about the renovation plans. Joël Cahen, director of the Jewish Historical Museum and the Hollandsche Schouwburg from 2002 until 2015, has been and remains an important driving force of this process. Staff member Annemiek Gringold and Esther Göbel developed a concept for a new permanent exhibition based on a chronological dramaturgy. I worked closely with them and Hetty Berg, manager of museum affairs, in particular in preparing a monograph on the Hollandsche Schouwburg.[18] I was involved in several events such as the annual May 4 commemorations at this memorial site, the Museum Night of 2013 and an educational program for the exhibition *Selamat Shabbat: The Unknown History of Jews in the Dutch East Indies* (2014-2015). I interviewed several people who were been involved in the renovation of the Hollandsche Schouwburg in the early 1990s: former director of the Jewish Historical Museum Judith Belinfante; former interim director of the Amsterdam Historical Museum Norbert van den Berg; staff members Petra Katzenstein and Peter Buijs; and designer Victor Levie. Furthermore, I interviewed staff members involved in the current affairs and renovation plans: Joël Cahen, Annemiek Gringold, former head of the Hollandsche Schouwburg and currently curator Shoah, and Denise Citroen and Machteld Aardse, who developed two memory projects discussed in the last chapter.

The culture and atmosphere I encountered at the museum was one of intense personal investment and dedication, especially when it comes to the topic of the Holocaust. There was a culture of cautious deliberation in order to create consensus and broad support, which at times led to a certain amount of indecisiveness. Furthermore, the museum depends on a strong network and grants and private donations, which at times resulted in expedited decisions. Even though the Jewish Historical Museum addresses a broad and inclusive (inter)national public, it has always had a special relationship with the Jewish community, both in Amsterdam and internationally. Former museum directors Belinfante (1976-1998) and Cahen (2002-2015), who both played a major role in shaping the Hollandsche Schouwburg as a memorial museum, organized broad support within the Jewish community when executing their plans. Belinfante oversaw the transfer of the memorial to the Jewish Historical Museum and the subsequent renovations in the early 1990s. Because of her experience at the Jewish Historical Museum, the overall design of the Hollandsche Schouwburg was restrained – there was no explicit visual material depicting Nazi cruelty, for instance – out of respect for first- and second-generation survivors. Soon after Cahen became director, he formulated the ambition to create a national Holocaust museum that was more outward looking and socially engaged. One of the first steps was to hire Annemiek Gringold to develop active engaging programming at the Hollandsche Schouwburg that would address a larger public. He combined his network in the Netherlands with his international experience and as such was able to propel the Hollandsche Schouwburg in a new direction. After he was succeeded by Emile Schrijver as director, he remained actively involved as project director for the National Holocaust Museum and continued to help determine its future course.

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[18] Van Vree, Berg, and Duindam, *De Hollandsche Schouwburg*. A fully revised edition appeared in 2018. See Van Vree, Berg, and Duindam, *Site of Deportation*.

I am also invested on a more personal level. When I began this project, I had no personal ties to the memory and history of the Holocaust. Two years into my research, there was an unexpected turn of events while I was preparing for a trip to see my family in Indonesia, precipitated by doing some research into the background of my late Indonesian grandmother. One day, I was standing in front of the wall of names. Instead of observing other visitors – as a proper distanced researcher would do – I took out my own camera to take a photograph of the name Van Beugen (see figure P.1). There it was, lodged between Beugeltas and Beuth, a toponym referring to a small Dutch town near the German border. Van Beugen is the family name of my maternal grandmother and I knew very little about this side of the family. After some investigation I found out that Elias van Beugen was my great-grandfather. He was born in 1878 in The Hague as part of an orthodox Jewish family of twelve children. Elias moved to the Dutch East Indies in 1897 where he was successively a soldier, journalist and administrator for the Dutch government until his death in 1935. He was married to an Indonesian woman and had five children, one of them my grandmother. At least four

Figure P.1 Wall of names

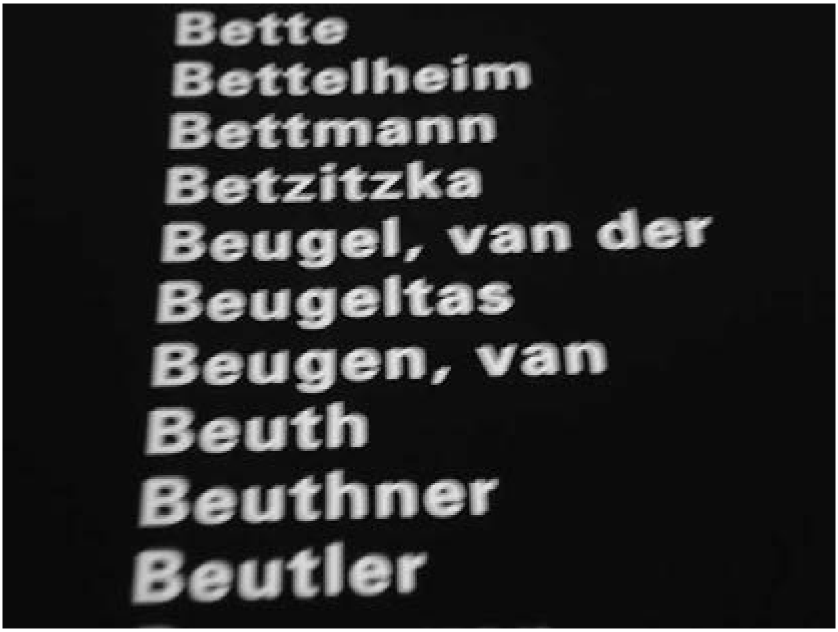

Photo David Duindam, 2012

of his brothers and sisters back in the Netherlands would be murdered in Sobibor and Auschwitz during World War II. When I asked my mother to show me the family archive – an old suitcase full of unorganized photographs and papers – I found a JOKOS file, a claim presented to the Federal Republic of Germany after the war regarding looted household contents, submitted by family members of Eliazer van Beugen. The claim was granted and the list of recipients provided insight into the globally dispersed family, who lived in Enschede (the Netherlands), New Jersey (the United States), and Jakarta (Indonesia), among other places.

A short while after this discovery I visited Indonesia, where I met the 30-year-old Toar Palilingan, great-great-grandson of Elias van Beugen. When he found out about his ancestor at the age of 15, he decided to convert to Judaism, took the name Yaakov Baruch and now runs one of the few synagogues in Indonesia.[19] He brought me to the grave of Elias onto which he had placed a tombstone engraved with a Hebrew text and an incorrect year of death. When I pointed this out, he shrugged his shoulders and said he would correct it. The apparent ease with which he shaped the memory of our common ancestor was fascinating. His story made me wonder how becoming aware of one's heritage can result in such a strong identification with Judaism. Or does his imagination run amok? It was not much different from me making the history of the Hollandsche Schouwburg my own because of our shared family name. It is precisely the lack of knowledge that spurs our curiosity and allows for a personal and emotional engagement. It also demonstrates how the Hollandsche Schouwburg is part of an ever-expanding network of memory that constantly produces new connections.

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[19] Coincidentally, Yaakov Baruch was part of the aforementioned Jewish Historical Museum exhibition *Selamat Shabbat* as one of the few remaining Jews in Indonesia.

The Hollandsche Schouwburg may at first appear to be a straightforward object of analysis. It is clearly demarcated, is heavily implicated with the memory of the Holocaust and presents its visitors with distinct commemorative rituals. However, when investigating how these elements came about and how they currently function, I found that the memory of this site is not stable, that rituals are not given but coproduced by visitors, and that its borders are not fixed demarcations but rather fluid and permeable.

In order to come to a better understanding of how the past is made present at this site of memory, this book combines a synchronic and diachronic approach. Chapter 1 frames the topic within several important academic fields, namely memory, heritage and museum studies. How do physical remnants of the past remediate that past? The issues of authenticity and historicity of the museum as a collection of media and other technologies are addressed, as well as that of spatial memory. Chapter 2 focuses on the postwar debate about the purpose and physical appearance and reconstructions of the Schouwburg. Was the former theater during the seventeen years prior to the establishment of the memorial in 1962 a site of silence or rather an important facilitator in the creation of a public memory of the Holocaust? Chapter 3 investigates the commemorations that were held in and around the Schouwburg, both by Jewish and non-Jewish organizations. Did these entail an appropriation of this site, radically changing its meaning? Or did the site enable and coproduce the performance of divergent memories? This chapter also investigates visiting practices that developed along with, but also in contrast to the official purpose of this site, and how the memorial was renovated under the supervision of the Jewish Historical Museum in the early 1990s. Chapter 4 analyzes the current presentation of the site, with a focus on its historical and material development, and the active role of the visitor in the production of memory and meaning. The current memorial museum is not a discrete medium that transmits a coherent narrative, but rather a spatial configuration of multiple media and technologies that at times compete with each other. The result is a fragmented narrative that forces visitors to make sense of and appropriate it on their own terms. The final chapter delineates the spatial borders and addresses the persistent expansion of sites of memory and the way they interact with their environments and local inhabitants.